

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

AID-05 COME-00 EB-07 FRB-03 TRSE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03

CIEP-01 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 AGR-05 CU-02 SCCT-01

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4584

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BOGOTA 3818

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CO

SUBJECT: LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION TWO YEARS AFTER THE ELECTION

1. SUMMARY. JUST TWO YEARS AFTER HIS ELECTION BY A HISTORIC MAJORITY, PRESIDENT LOPEZ' ADMINISTRATION HAS DEVELOPED A NUMBER OF SOFT SPOTS, INCLUDING DISAPPOINTED EXPECTATIONS OF SOCIAL REFORM, SECURITY, CORRUPTION, AND SOME DISSATISFACTION IN COLOMBIA'S MILITARY. NEVERTHELESS, THE OUTLOOK FOR STABILITY IS GOOD, ALTHOUGH MUCH DEPENDS ON LOPEZ' OWN WILLINGNESS TO ADOPT STERN MEASURES, WHEN THEY BECOME NECESSARY, TO MAINTAIN ORDER. THE PERIOD AFTER THE MID-TERM ELECTION MAY WELL SEE VARIOUS PRESSURES ON LOPEZ TO MODIFY ECONOMIC/SOCIAL POLICY DIRECTIONS. SOME CABINET CHANGES, THE DEMISE OF ANAPO, AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE EXTREME LEFT MOIR AND UNO AS THE PRINCIPAL ADVERSARIES OF THE TWO TRADITIONAL PARTIES AND OF COLOMBIAN INSTITUTIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. WITH THE EVENTS OF LATE MARCH (STUDENT TURMOIL, TEACHERS STRIKE, COUP RUMORS) BEHIND US AND IN THIS PERIOD OF PRE-ELECTORAL CALM IT MAY BE USEFUL TO ASSESS BRIEFLY WHERE COLOMBIA AND THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION

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NOW STAND AND TO LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEAR FUTURE.

3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC. THE RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT OF THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION IN SOME RESPECTS HAS BEEN IMPRESSIVE. THE RATE OF INFLATION APPEARS TO BE DOWN AND TAX REVENUES, DESIGNED EVENTUALLY TO HELP THE NEEDIEST COLOMBIANS, HAVE INCREASED. NEVERTHELESS, THE LOT OF THE AVERAGE COLOMBIAN IS NO BETTER AND MAY BE WORSE NOW THAN WHEN LOPEZ WAS ELECTED JUST TWO YEARS AGO. FOR COLOMBIANS IT IS A SOMEWHAT ACADEMIC CONSOLATION, AS EX-PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS RECENTLY REMARKED, TO BE TOLD THAT INFLATION HAS DECLINED FROM 27PCT TO 18 PCT. THE MAN IN THE STREET IS PRIMARILY AWARE OF THE FACT THAT PRICE RISES CONTINUE TO OUTSTRIP INCREASES, IF ANY, IN HIS BORDERLINE INCOME. AS TO UNEMPLOYMENT, WHATEVER THE UNRELIABLE OFFICIAL STATISTICS MAY INDICATE, IT IS QUESTIONABLE THAT THE ECONOMY, CONSTRAINED BY DEFLATIONARY POLICIES, HAS PRODUCED AN INCREASE IN JOB OPPORTUNITIES TO ABSORB THE HORDES OF NEW ARRIVALS THAT ENTER THE LABOR FORCE EACH YEAR IN THIS HIGH BIRTHRATE COUNTRY. ALSO, THE INCREASE IN REVENUES HAS NOT YET BEGUN TO BENEFIT ANY SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF POORER COLOMBIANS UNDER THE LOPEZ INCOME REDISTRIBUTION PROGRAM. EVEN IF, AS NOW SEEMS LIKELY, THE GOC IS ABLE TO PROTECT ITS INCREASED REVENUE YIELDS FROM THE "VORACIOUS BUREAUCRACY", IT MAY WELL BE YEARS BEFORE THOSE REVENUES BENEFIT POORER COLOMBIANS, IN THE FORM OF IMPROVED AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, EDUCATION AND HEALTH, DUE TO INCAPACITY AT THE MIDDLE AND LOWER ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUREAUCRATIC LEVELS. IN SUM, AN ADMINISTRATION WHICH AWAKENED POPULAR EXPECTATIONS OF SOCIAL CHANGE AND OF RESPONSIVENESS TO THE NEEDS OF SOCIETY HAS NOT YET MET THOSE EXPECTATIONS, ALTHOUGH IT MAY WELL DO SO OVER THE LONGER TERM.

4. STABILITY AND SECURITY. THE ABOVE SITUATION OBVIOUSLY PROVIDES A FERTILE FIELD FOR EXTREMIST AGITATION, YET, MASS POVERTY AND GREAT SOCIAL INEQUALITY ARE CHRONIC TO COLOMBIA. ANALYSTS OF THE LOCAL SCENE OFTEN NOTE THAT THE SITUATION IS RIPE FOR THE EMERGENCE OF A LEFTIST OR POPULIST POLITICAL FORCE OR PERSONALITY WHICH COULD CAPTURE DISCONTENT AND USE IT TO ALTER THE SOCIAL ORDER. SINCE THE ASSASSINATION IN

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1948 OF POPULIST LIBERAL LEADER JORGE ELIEZER GAITAN, ONLY ANAPO, WHEN IT WAS LED BY EX-DICTATOR GENERAL ROJAS PINILLA (WHO DIED IN 1975), HAD THE POTENTIAL TO MARSHAL DISCONTENT INTO A SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL ALTERNATIVE. SIGNIFICANT AND ACTIVE OPPOSITION TO THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION, AND TO THE ESTABLISHED ORDER, NOW COMES FROM THE EXTREME LEFT, SUCH AS THE MAOIST MOIR AND OTHER SMALLER GROUPS TO THE LEFT OF THE MOSCOW-LINE COLOMBIAN COMMUNIST PARTY. THE

PARTY AND THE CSTC LABOR CONFEDERATION WHICH IT CONTROLS
HAVE NOT POSED MAJOR PROBLEMS FOR THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION.

5. THE EXTREME LEFT OPPOSITION TO LOPEZ HAS BEEN EXTRA-
PARLIAMENTARY AND EXTRA-LEGAL, IN THE FOR OF LABOR DISPUTES
IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR, UNIVERSITY STUDENT VIOLENCE, AND URBAN
AND RURAL TERRORISM. RECENT EVENTS HAVE INCLUDED ALL THREE
OF THESE TECHNIQUES AND HAVE PROMPTED PRESIDENT LOPEZ
AND OTHER GOC OFFICIALS TO COMMENT PUBLICLY ABOUT A "PLOT TO
UNDERMINE COLOMBIAN INSTITUTIONS". IT IS NOT CLEAR THAT
SUCH INCIDENTS AS THE NATIONAL TEACHERS' STRIKES IN LATE MARCH
AND EARLY APRIL, DISORDERS AT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY AND
ELSEWHERE, TERRORIST INCIDENTS SUCH AS THE KIDNAPPING
CTC PRESIDENT JOSE RAQUEL MERCADO AND SUBSEQUENT DEMANDS ON
THE GOC BY THE KIDNAPPERS, ARE ELEMENTS OF A SINGLE CONSPIRACY
BUT THEY WERE CONVERGENT.

6 THE INDEPENDENT AND REVOLUTIONARY WORKERS MOVEMENT
(MOIR), THOUGH SMALL, HAS MANAGED OVER SEVERAL YEARS TO GAIN
DECISIVE INFLUENCE IN THE NATIONAL TEACHERS FEDERATION (FECODE),
UNIONS IN THE SEMI-STATE OWNED BANKS, AND AMONG STUDENTS
AND FACULTY ON SOME UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES, ESPECIALLY THE
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY. THE RECENT AGITATIONS MAY HAVE HAD
THE AIM OF DISTURBING THE ELECTIONS (AS GOVERNMENT SPOKESMEN
HAVE CLAIMED), FRUSTRATING GOVERNMENT SOCIAL WELFARE PROGRAMS
BY DIVERTING INCREASED REVENUES FOR PUBLIC SECTOR SALARY
INCREASES, OR SIMPLY TO DISCREDIT LOPEZ' ABILITY TO GOVERN.
IN ANY EVENT, DECISIVE GOVERNMENT ACTION, SELL WITHIN THE COLOMBIAN
TRADITION, TO CLOSE THE UNIVERSITY AND TO DISCIPLINE VIOLENT
STUDENTS AND STRIKING TEACHERS, HAS THWARTED THESE AIMS. THE
URBAN TERRORIST THREAT IS NOT SO SUSCEPTIBLE TO SOLUTION BUT
IS IS NOT AT A LEVEL TO CONSTITUTE, BY ITSELF, A THREAT TO
STABILITY
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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BOGOTA 3818

7. THE LOPEZ STYLE. LOPEZ DID NOT TAKE THE ABOVE ACTIONS AGAINST THE UNIVERSITY AND TEACHERS UNTIL THERE WAS COMPELLING NEED FOR SUCH A MOVE. HE HAD HIS OWN REASONS FOR NOT MOVING PRECIPITATELY, AS HE WOULD PROBABLY PUT IT, BUT HIS RELUCTANCE TO ACT, UNTIL HE CLEARLY HAD TO, PROJECTED TO MANY COLOMBIANS THE IMAGE OF AN INDECISIVE AND EVEN WEAK EXECUTIVE. IT ALSO HELPED TO CREATE THE KIND OF ATMOSPHERE WHICH ALLOWED SOME COLOMBIANS TO BELIEVE THAT THE MILITARY HAD PUSHED HIM TO MOVE. LOPEZ IS NOT INDECISIVE AND WE DOUBT THAT HE REACTED TO PRESSURE FROM THE MILITARY. HE IS, HOWEVER, RELUCTANT TO MOVE IN A WAY THAT CAN BE CONSTRUED AS REPRESSIVE UNTIL HE IS SURE HE HAS TO.

8. LOPEZ BEGAN HIS ADMINISTRATION, AND CONTINUES, COMMITTED TO A SYSTEM OF LIBERTIES AND FREEDOM OF OPINION. IN ADDITION, LOPEZ PROBABLY BELIEVED THAT HIS ELECTION JUST TWO YEARS AGO BY THE LARGEST MAJORITY IN COLOMBIAN HISTORY, THE "CLEAR MANDATE", WOULD ENABLE HIM TO GOVERN BY RELYING ON BROAD POPULAR SUPPORT RATHER THAN LEGAL FORCE. AMONG HIS FIRST ACTS AFTER TAKING OFFICE WERE THE GRANTING OF LEGAL STATUS TO THE COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED CSTC AND THE APPOINTMENT OF A PHILOSOPHICAL MARXIST AS RECTOR OF THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, WHO READMITTED CONFIDENTIAL

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TO THE UNIVERSITY MANY MILITANT EXTREME LEFTIST PROFESSORS AND STUDENTS WHO HAD BEEN PURGED BY THE PREVIOUS CONSERVATIVE ADMINISTRATION. UNDER THE PRESSURE OF EVENTS, LOPEZ HAS BEEN FORCED TO ABANDON THIS LIBERAL POSITION, WITH OBVIOUS RELUCTANCE. THE UNIVERSITY BECAME INCREASINGLY RADICALIZED AND, FOLLOWING A CONFRONTATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT LATE LAST YEAR, LOPEZ FIRED THE RECTOR. WITH THE CLOSING OF THE UNIVERSITY AND A LIKELY ATTEMPT BY THE GOC TO CLEAN IT OUT LOPEZ HAS NOW COME FULL CIRCLE. SIMILARLY, LOPEZ

PROCLAIMED A STATE OF SIEGE IN MAY 1975, AFTER HAVE SAID HE WOULD REIMPOSE IT ONLY AS A LAST RESORT, AND HAS CONTINUED IT THROUGH THE CURRENT ELECTORAL PERIOD, THE FIRST ADMINISTRATION IN RECENT YEARS TO DO SO THE PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATION LIFTED THE LAST STATE OF SIEGE IN LATE 1973 AND CONSERVATIVE PRESIDENT PASTRANA COULD ANNOUNCE THAT HIS ADMINISTRATION HAD SO SET ITS HOUSE IN ORDER THAT FULL CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES COULD BE RESTORED. GIVEN HIS COMMITMENT TO INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY, LOPEZ UNDOUBTEDLY LOOKS UPON HIS IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE RELATIVELY COERCIVE MEASURES, MORE CHARACTERISTIC OF PRECEDING NATIONAL FRONT GOVERNMENTS, AS POLITICAL SETBACKS AND HE HAS TAKEN THEM SLOWLY AND ONLY WHEN HE MUST.

9. THE MILITARY. LOPEZ' SLOWNESS TO TAKE STRONG MEASURES AGAINST DISORDERS HAS CAUSED CONSIDERABLE GRUMBLING AMONG SOME SECTORS OF THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY. THESE GROUPS WERE PROBABLY ALREADY SOMEWHAT EDGY ABOUT LOPEZ BEFORE HIS ELECTION, DUE TO HIS LEFTIST IMAGE. THE LEGALIZATION BY LOPEZ OF THE CSTC AND RECOGNITION OF CUBA, WHICH BROUGHT WITH IT A CUBAN EMBASSY IN BOGOTA, PRODUCED FURTHER DISSATISFACTION. MILITARY ANNOYANCE WITH LOPEZ IS NOT OF SUCH A LEVEL AS TO THREATEN STABILITY. ALSO, LOPEZ HAS BOTH MOLLIFIED THE MILITARY (I.E., DECLARING THE STATE OF SIEGE) AND SHOWN HE COULD BE TOUGH WITH THEM, AS WHEN HE FIRED THE POPULAR ARMY COMMANDER, GENERAL VALENCIA TOVAR, LAST YEAR. UNDER FORESEEABLE CIRCUMSTANCES THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY IS NOT LIKELY TO ABANDON ITS TRADITIONAL CONSTITUTIONAL ROLE.

10. CORRUPTION. A MORE INSIDIOUS ISSUE, THE CONSIDERABLE POTENTIAL FOR DAMAGE TO COLOMBIAN INSTITUTIONS AND TO THE CONFIDENTIAL

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LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION, IS THAT OF CORRUPTION, WHICH LOPEZ HIMSELF HAS DESCRIBED AS A MAJOR CONCERN. POLITICIANS PRIVATELY LAMENT PRESS COVERAGE OF THE NUMEROUS SCANDALS AS BEING ERODITIVE OF PUBLIC FAITH IN DEMOCRACY AND THE INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNMENT BUT ADMIT THAT CORRUPTION IS, IN FACT, WIDESPREAD AND GROWING. TWO FORMER HIGH OFFICIALS, THE EX-HEAD OF DAS (SECURITY POLICE) AND THE EX-COMPTROLLER GENERAL, ARE UNDER INDICTMENT - THE LATTER IS A FUGITIVE FROM JUSTICE. RUMORS TO THE EFFECT THAT CORRUPTION HAS REACHED THE HIGHEST GOVERNMENT CIRCLES HAVE BECOME MORE FREQUENT. LOPEZ' IMMEDIATE FAMILY IS NOT EXEMPT FROM SUCH SPECULATION, NOR IS THAT OF POWERFUL PARTY LEADER AND AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON JULIO CESAR TURBAY.

11. THE OUTLOOK. THE APRIL 18 ELECTION PERIOD MAY MARK THE TURNING OF A CORNER FOR LOPEZ. THE ELECTION ITSELF WILL

PROBABLY CONFIRM THE DEMISE OF ANAPO AS THE PRINCIPAL
OPPOSITION TO THE TWO TRADITIONAL PARTIES AND MARK THE
EMERGENCE OF THE MAOIST MOIR AND COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED
NATIONAL OPPOSITION UNION (UNO) AS THE NEW, SMALL BUT GROWING
OPPOSITION. LOPEZ' RECENT COMMENT THAT, OVER THE LONGER
TERM, THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE WILL BE BETWEEN THOSE PARTIES
WHICH DEFEND THE SYTEM AND THOSE WHICH WISH TO TEAR IT DOWN,
MAY BE CONFIRMED. A LACKLUSTER PERFORMANCE BY THE CONSERVATIVES,
AS EXPECTED, MIGHT CASE THEM TO SEEK AN INFORMAL COALITION
WITH SOME LIBERAL FACTIONS, FOR 1978. SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT
WOULD BE WELCOMED BY MANY LEBERALS. LOPEZ' USE OF STRONG
MEASURES, WHILE UNPALATABLE TO HIM, EFFECTIVELY DEFEATED THE
MOST RECENT THREATS TO STABILITY POSED BY STRIKES AND STUDENT
DISORDERS. HE WILL BE ABLE TO COPE WITH SIMILAR CHALLENGES
IN THE FUTURE BY SIMILAR MEASURES, WHICH HE MAY NOW BE LESS
RELUCTANT TO TAKE. DEPENDING ON THE ELECTORAL OUTCOME, LOPEZ
MAY FEEL PRESSURE TO DEEMPHASIZE ANTI-INFLATIONARY POLICIES IN
FAVOR OF MORE POPULAR EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIALLY ORIENTED MEASURES.
THERE ARE LIKELY TO BE MINISTERIAL CHANGES OVER THE
NEXT FEW MONTHS, LARGELY FOR POLITCAL RATHER THAN
SUBSTANTIVE REASONS. LABOR MINISTER MARIA ELENA DE CROVO,
WHOSE INTEMPERATE REMARKS AND HEAVY DRINKING HAVE MADE HER
A GROWING LIABILITY TO THE ADMINISTRATION. IS THE MOST
LIKELY TO GO, ACCORDING TO MANY OBSERVERS. FINANCE MINISTER
BOTERO MAY ALSO BE DISEMBARKED DUE TO HIS CONSIDERABLE
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PERSONAL UNPOPULARITY AMONG MANY POLITICIANS AND ECONOMIC
LEADERS. PRESSURES TO CHANGE GOC ECONOMIC POLICIES,
FASHIONED LARGELY BY BOTERO, WILL PROBABLY INCREASE,
ALTHOUGH THE FIGHT AGAINST INFLATION IS LIKELY TO REMAIN
A PRIORITY GOAL.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL STABILITY, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 14 APR 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: coburnhl
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976BOGOTA03818
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760143-0447
From: BOGOTA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760464/aaaacchs.tel
Line Count: 314
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: coburnhl
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 14 JUL 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <14 JUL 2004 by MartinML>; APPROVED <26 OCT 2004 by coburnhl>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION TWO YEARS AFTER THE ELECTION
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, CO, (LOPEZ MICHELSEN, ALFONSO)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006